



COVID-19 IPPF Innovation and best practice: Digitalising for young people

“The youth population are heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, greatly reducing their mobility and access to sexual and reproductive health information and services. AMPPF harnessed social networks such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Web TV, and You Tube to equip them with Sexuality Education knowledge. It was important to build the capacity of the AMPPF Youth Action Movement to produce animation and video reporting to feed the Web TV broadcasts.”

Moussa M'BO, Director of Programmes, AMPPF

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) provides young people with accurate information and skills to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and take control of their sexual well-being. Reports have suggested that high adolescent birth rates occur in all countries where sexuality education (SE) is curtailed.

CSE programmes addressing gender, rights and power are up to five times more effective in reducing negative outcomes, including unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). CSE has a transformative impact with teaching methods that support students to question social and cultural norms around gender and develop gender-equitable attitudes, and leads to more consistent condom use, lower pregnancy rates, and reduced risk of HIV infection and partner violence.

COVID-19 saw the closure of schools and face-to-face gatherings worldwide, meaning a halt to CSE for many young people. In response, International Planned Parenthood Federation Member Associations got innovative in using digital tools to engage with young people and continue delivering Sexuality Education.*

The initial findings of IPPF's COVID-19 impact survey March 2020 indicated that the Malian Association for the Protection and Promotion of the Family (AMPPF) digitalised sexuality education to reach youth in their homes whilst education closures were enforced as part of the lockdown

This Learning Brief highlights innovations through the Malian Association for the Protection and Promotion of the Family (AMPPF) COVID-19 enhanced sexuality education implementation plan during the pandemic.

* Sexuality education through online tools is referred to as digital SE.

COVID-19 impact

The COVID-19 pandemic in Mali resulted in numerous restrictions in the country, with schools being forced to close. As a country with one of the highest fertility rates in the Africa region¹ and where only a quarter of Malian girls complete high school, CSE is an essential AMPPF service for young people, both inside and outside school. AMPPF had expanded youth services through its networks from 2018, but COVID-19 had reduced its service activities by over 50 per cent. To strengthen CSE, the MA trained 70 teachers on the seven components of CSE while 229 students were trained on the different components through social and digital platforms; this resulted into 160,288 young people being reached with components of digital SE.

Enhancing services in the pandemic

AMPPF quickly converted its face-to-face CSE model to hold online sessions on digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. Awareness campaigns were conducted by radio and social media to complement the online sessions. AMPPF worked with the youth action movement (YAM) members and trained community-based peer educators as youth champions who facilitated digital sexuality education (SE) through WhatsApp groups and worked through the modules with youth groups to ensure that discussions supported the learning sessions to answer all questions.

Digitalising for young people

The AMPPF digital SE sessions are conducted through weekly sessions on Facebook and interactive WhatsApp learning groups. SRHR education programmes are broadcasted via a dedicated web-based AMPPF TV channel on YouTube and Facebook. To achieve this and to keep groups connected, AMPPF assists with connection devices and internet packages to allow the youth facilitators to run the interactive sessions. Weekly thematic sessions are held in group presentations while respecting the COVID-19 barrier measures. The digital SE content has enabled AMPPF to work with the largest group of young people they have ever served, in 2020 160,288 young people have been reached through online services.



"I have been working with AMPPF for four 4 years as a young volunteer. The COVID-19 pandemic has left so many young people behind with no one to turn to for information and services. They still need our support. I had to learn to get used to a camera and get communities involved. It is especially important to talk to the people at SRH, but also to get them to ask questions and realize that it is safe and good to know. I have good feedback from people who watch my programmes and know that it makes a difference."

Satan Diaby, Treasurer of the AMPPF Youth Action Movement - Bamako District and web TV presenter

Key challenges

- Addressing the barriers around comprehensive sexuality education – stigma, rumours, and socio-cultural and religious perceptions.
- Low literacy levels among young people.
- Content required more translation into local languages, especially for out of school youth.
- Continuing engagement for youth activities through animation and online TV reporting.
- Building young people's capacity to harness Web TV.
- Retaining trained peer educators.
- Online access is costly for young people.

Lessons

- The digitalisation of the Sexuality Education (SE) strategies has demonstrated the successful reach of online services.
- The potential to increase telemedicine access and digital educational platforms if future financial resources can be found.
- Young people have expressed an interest in strengthening their knowledge of online SE but can limit group sizes.
- The interactive debates were useful to help young people with SE themes.



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MAJ/AMPPF

Next steps

- Formalize learning on digital platforms for Sexuality Education. This involves development of tools to provide meaningful youth engagement for online learning, sharing information and service provision. Development of an app to facilitate the content and learning will make it more accessible for youth.
- Engage relevant stakeholders in health and education to ensure that policies are in place to support CSE work in the country.
- Pursue peer to peer learning opportunities within the IPPF Africa Region including Togo MA as the Center of Excellence (CoE) for youth and have achieved great success delivering online SE.

Recommendations for SRH services, governments, and civil society organizations (CSOs)

- Based on the local experiences and needs identified during the COVID-19 response, guidelines for delivering online sexuality education (SE) and to provide technical assistance and capacity building should be developed. Digital SE interventions are likely to be more beneficial when mainstreamed and conducted along with online classes during routine school hours and should complement rather than replace face-to-face delivery.
- Governments should ensure that country-level emergency preparedness plans include continuous access to SE for all young people as part of contingency schooling systems, through online and other digital interventions aimed at reaching underserved young people.
- Governments and CSOs should invest in closing the digital gap and ensure that essential SRH services are available and linked with digital SE during emergencies.
- As the most active digital technologies users, Youth networks, youth volunteers and CSOs working on youth should develop digital platforms to promote SE and increase young people's broader engagement, including those most vulnerable. Online SE must be delivered in safe digital spaces, free of risks related to cyberbullying and sexual and gender-based violence, where young people's privacy or anonymity is protected.

Endnotes

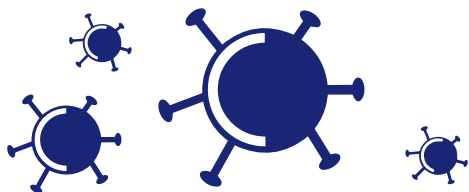
[1] UN Population Division Data 2019 accessed May 11, 2021 <https://population.un.org/dataportal/home>

IPPF COVID-19 Impact Surveys

IPPF COVID-19 Impact survey 1 March 2020: COVID-19 Survey Results | IPPF (ippf-covid19.org)

IPPF COVID-19 Impact survey 2 June 2020: COVID-19 Round 2 Survey Results | IPPF (ippf-covid19.org)

IPPF COVID-19 Impact survey 3 November 2020: COVID-19 Round 3 Survey Results | IPPF (ippf-covid19.org)



About AMPPF

The Malian Association for the Protection and Promotion of the Family (AMPPF) strives to improve the sexual and reproductive health of the Malian people. The Association works through a vast network of sexual and reproductive health (HRS) counselling; neonatal, gynecological, postnatal and post-abortion care; and HIV and AIDS prevention and management. THE AMPPF has hundreds of volunteers, a powerful youth action movement and hundreds of peer educators and community distributors.



Who we are

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) offers sexual and reproductive health services that allow people to make their own choices. We fight for everyone to exercise their right to make those choices. We are local, through our members and volunteers, and around the world, through our network. We respond to needs, wherever they are, whoever they need, for as long as they want.

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Image 1: Mali/ AMPPF
Image 2: Mali/ AMPPF
Image 3: Mali/ AMPPF
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